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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000246

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CU](#) [EZ](#) [EUN](#)  
SUBJECT: CUBA: CZECHS PROVIDE INSIGHTS ON SOFTENING  
EUROPEAN MOOD

REF: A. PRAGUE 138  
[1](#)B. PRAGUE 125  
[1](#)C. 07 PRAGUE 1244

Classified By: Econ Counselor Karen Choe  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: During her April 15 visit to Prague, WHA Deputy Assistant Secretary Kirsten Madison engaged a wide range of Czech officials, parliamentarians, NGOs, and think tanks on Cuba. The Czech perspective on how to promote democratic change in Cuba dovetails closely with USG policy on Cuba and the Czechs are very actively engaged within the EU to advance this view. The Czechs are supporting political prisoners in Cuba in a number of ways and they are looking to do more. Czech MFA officials flagged for our attention, however, that the trend within the EU is toward lifting the EU's "June Measures," although the Czechs "are not giving up." They also are beginning to consider how their upcoming EU Presidency (beginning January 1, 2009) will be affected by and impact their activities related to Cuba within the EU. End Summary.

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Cuban "Reforms" Viewed with Skepticism  
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[1](#)2. (U) Across the board - from MFA officials and parliamentarians, to NGOs and think tanks - the recent "reforms" announced by the Cuban government are viewed with skepticism. Many of our interlocutors dismissed these announcements from Havana as simple publicity campaigns, since people outside of Cuba have heard more about these reforms than local Cubans. Czech MFA Section Chief Jakub Karfik most succinctly stated the Czech sentiment when he indicated that real change in Cuba would involve the regime taking positive steps to address its political prisoners. He also pointed out that it is one thing to sign the "Covenant on Civil and Political Rights," as Cuba has recently done, but it is another thing to implement it. Madison noted her visit to Geneva, which focused on human rights issues including the question of how the international community could press the Cuban government to adjust its behavior to comport with its new commitments under this Covenant.

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Czechs Share USG Commitment to Democratic Change  
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[1](#)3. (SBU) During DAS Madison's discussions, the clear Czech emphasis was on how to accomplish our shared goal of democratic change in Cuba. Madison noted that the U.S. will be looking for language in the upcoming June U.S.-EU Summit declaration that underscores the shared commitment to respect for human rights and for a democratic outcome in Cuba. With respect to actions in Cuba, the Czech interlocutors, particularly the very active NGO People in Need, made

abundant references to a myriad of different programs aimed at assisting political prisoners and their families as well as the opposition more broadly. The Czech MFA Department of Human Rights and Transition Policy made clear that the Czechs, while working with small budgets and programs, are strongly committed to this goal of democratic change. At the personal encouragement of Czech Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg, who is well known for his commitment to promote human rights, the MFA is actively seeking ways to do more. Throughout the full day of meetings, there were few areas of disagreement, other than the regular references to our embargo, which the Czechs believe is counterproductive.

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June Measures - "May Not Survive"  
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¶4. (C) Czech MFA Section Chief Karfik indicated that prior to meeting with DAS Madison he had read through the EU's "June measures," which directly linked EU punitive measures (limits to bilateral high-level government visits, reduction in profile of EU participation at Cuban cultural events, invitations to Cuban dissidents at national day celebrations and a re-evaluation of the EU Common Position) with developments in Cuba regarding political prisoners, and in his opinion, every sentence still held true and nothing merited revision. However, he bluntly stated that given the current mood within the EU, the June Measures "may not survive." He indicated that some "influential" old EU member states have been particularly engaged in pressing other members to agree to lift the measures. The Czechs confirmed that they are "not giving up," but they are clearly not encouraged by the prospects for maintaining these measures given the prevailing sentiment within the EU, which they feel is stronger and more vocal than it was last year. Madison

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noted that from her meetings prior to coming to Prague, there appear to be some other EU member states, like the United Kingdom, that would support a more patient approach by the EU and that these countries would be looking for concrete progress by the Cuban government on issues like political prisoners prior to major changes in the EU Common Position.

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EU Majority Believe Change Will Come from Within Government  
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¶5. (C) According to MFA officials, EU engagement on Cuba follows the "dual track" model. Engagement with the Cuban regime (track one) is based on the belief, held by the majority of EU member states, that change in Cuba will come from within the government. Given the fragmentation of the Cuban opposition, many of these member states have begun to place less emphasis on engaging the opposition (track two). They have also begun to question whether the opposition is capable of constructing a viable new government, or whether it will play a constructive role in this process. In contrast, many of the newest EU member states, particularly those that recently underwent their own transition to Democracy from Communism, such as the Czechs, have less faith that change will come from within the existing Communist government and greater faith in the dissident community. Madison noted that the U.S. believes that a more expansive approach within track two was needed, given the increased energy seen in civil society - including with groups beyond the well-defined democratic opposition, such as students.

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Comment: High-Level Engagement Critical Over Next Few Months  
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¶6. (C) While the Czechs are a key principled ally on Cuba, and they are particularly active on this topic within the EU, we can anticipate that maneuvering and pressure from some of these "influential member states" over the next few months will be intense. The Czechs referenced Spain, Italy and France in this category. Trips like these high-level "roadshows" where we privately press EU member state

officials hard (especially those member states in the middle or the far end of the spectrum from us) can be very productive; as we look at upcoming public events we should be conscious of efforts by those opposed to the USG approach on Cuba to highlight the differences between USG and EU policy.

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